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The Effect of Pre-reading Activities on the Reading Comprehension Performance of Ilami High School Students

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Abstract

The present study was conducted for two purposes: (1) to compare the learners' comprehension ability before and after the implementation of two types of pre-reading activities, guessing reading content from asking pre-reading questions and vocabulary definition, (2) to investigate the learners' attitudes towards the implementation of two pre-reading activities. Research participants consisted of 60 grade-10 students studying at Omol Habibeh high school in Ilam, Iran. A test of reading comprehension ability was administered to assign the subjects into two groups. The two groups were given different pre-reading activity, guessing reading content from asking pre-reading questions and vocabulary definition, respectively. The research instrument consisted of reading comprehension test (used as pre- and post-tests). The experiment using the two pre-reading activities were carried out for 5 weeks two sessions a week. The data was analyzed statistically to identify means, standard deviation, and t-value. It was found that after implementation of the 2 pre-reading activities the subjects performed better in the post-test, at significant level of .05. When compared the results of the 2 pre-reading activities, it was found that the group receiving guessing meaning from pre-reading questions performed better than their counterpart who experienced vocabulary definitions, at .05. It was also found that both groups were satisfied with the activity they experienced.

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1. Background of the study

Reading as a major skill was ignored by pedagogues and researchers for a long period of time. Most of focus was placed on oral skills (listening and speaking). For example, the Audio lingual method which was developed in the United States during world war II when there was a need for people to learn foreign language rapidly for military purposes emphasized the oral skills, ignoring reading and considering it a passive skill which was given no emphasis at all.

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When the Audio lingual Method failed in fulfilling its mission ,other teaching methods were devised and put to use. The Cognitive Method in the united states and the communicative Approach in Britain came into being during the late 1960s.Equal attension has been given to the four skills together(listening, speaking ,reading and writing).pedagogues and researchers started to put more emphasis on reading comprehension as a major skill for students of English all over the world.

Reading ,the mother of all study skills ,is a basic tool of learning and one of the most important skills in everyday life(Fry, 1997, p.9).As a matter of fact ,nearly all children begin school with the expectation they will learn to read ,and one of the most important things a child is asked to do is to read . Trelease (1989), perhaps the united states best-known advocate of reading aloud ,indicated that by booking a child with reading ,you influence not only his future health and financial circumstaces ,but also those of the next generation.

Nowadays English learning is essential because English is the international communication medium. The language is necessary for different activities, including education, politics, and socio-economics (Medgyes, 1994; Mckay, 2002). Its importance is well recognized in Iran. It is the need for curriculum and teaching process revision in order to prepare student for real life application in the information age. The teaching should accommodate the learners' development of the 4 language skills. Reading skill, in particular, is the most important skill in second or foreign language learning (Carrell, 1988). Sookchotirat (2005) suggested that reading skill is the most important skill as it is the basis of all the success in one's life. Good readers can gain more knowledge of any kind from reading. Reading makes the reader more knowledgeable, have wider perspectives and vision. Reading helps the reader get new ideas leading to cognitive development. When the readers transfer what they read to apply with their own idea a new perspective or idea is created. However, there have been problems in English teaching in all educational levels in Iran, including secondary and university level. Graduates of each educational level do not have reading ability they should have. Generally, it can be claimed that the problem was caused by the inadequacy of teaching and learning time. Teaching reading is a continuing process; it should be given continuously from the first to the highest educational level. Teaching reading to learners at very young age is, therefore, the basis for the higher level (Noysangsri, 1988). Chiramanee (1992) indicated that Iranian learners' reading ability was at a low level. It could be resulted from inappropriate teaching method, using outdated teaching techniques, which failed to help the learners understand the content of the reading materials. Chandavimol (1998) suggested that in general practice of teaching reading, the learners would be assigned a reading task to read by themselves and do the post-reading exercises. In such reading activity, the teacher did not provide any activities that could motivate the reader or achieve better comprehension. Chatwirote (2003) suggested that the teachers could provide reading promoting activities, such as the activities that interest the learners. The activities should contain the reading objectives that suit the learners and teacher's interest. Reading the process of teaching reading, the teacher should have suitable steps of teaching reading. There should be a pre-reading step to prepare the reader before they read the whole material. The instructor should provide them with the pre-reading the learners did not have any background knowledge it would be the teachers' responsibility to provide the background knowledge to the learners in order that they could achieve the most comprehension from the reading. The teachers should provide the learners with various pre- reading activities that help them have certain amount of background knowledge about the reading text because the schema would help the reader get better comprehension (Graves, Watts and Graves,1994), as shown in the following studies. Yeeding (2007) investigated the effects of pre-reading activities on learners' motivation and reading comprehension ability. Results showed that the activities subjects were highly motivated, enthusiastic to read. After the experiment, they scored significantly higher. In another experimental study Taglieber, Johnson, & Yarbrough (1988) provided the experiment subjects with 3 pre-reading activities: guessing reading content from pictures, learning vocabulary before reading, and pre-reading question. The control group did not receive any of the 3 pre-reading activities. A pre-test and post-test were administered to both groups. It was found that the experimental subject performed better than the control group. In addition, the reading scores from the reading with guessing reading content from pictures, and pre-reading questioning were better than the reading with learning vocabulary before reading.

2. Statement of the Problem

Learning Englishas a foreign language is, undoubtedly, a complex and difficult process. comprehension is the ultimate goal of teaching reading. However, experience of that most students of the 10th grade are poor readers

despite their exposure to English instruction for 4 years. Students, obstacles in reading comprehension may be partially attributed to non-linguistic factors such as lack of motivation and interest. Williams (1984) indicated that a teacher who starts the reading lesson by asking his students to read the passage on page sound so and then to answer the questions is hardly likely to motivate them. But a teacher who starts his reading lesson by giving his students a reason to read and providing them with some preparation can certainly arouse their interest in the topic.

Despite the importance and relevance of the pre reading stage in reading comprehension, it is often ignored in traditional reading instruction. Ciclo de estudos (2012) claimed that the following practical preceding activities may help address these problems: 1. Pre-questioning 2. Vocabulary Pre-teaching.

Results from the studies reviewed above made the researcher of the present study realize the significance of applying pre-reading activities in teaching reading comprehension. The present research, therefore, was aimed at comparing the effects of 2 pre-reading activities-- guessing reading content from learning vocabulary before reading, and pre-reading questioning. In other words, the study would investigate whether the 2 pre-reading activities help the learners get better comprehension and to determine the extent of the effect on the learners' comprehension. It was expected that the results from the present study could be used to improve the learners' reading comprehension.

3. Research Questions

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. Can and to what extent guessing reading content from pre-questioning, and vocabulary activities help learners improve their reading ability?
2. Which among the two pre-reading activities (guessing reading content from pre-questioning, learning vocabulary before reading) can best improve the learners' reading comprehension ability?

4. Methodology

The present study was conducted to compare the learners' reading comprehension before and after the treatment, i.e. learning reading comprehension with 2 pre-reading activities (guessing reading content from pre-reading questioning and vocabulary definitions). It was also aimed to determine the learners' reading comprehension ability improved from experiencing teaching with guessing reading content from vocabulary compared with that gained from learning with pre-reading questioning activities. The learners' attitude and satisfaction towards the 2 pre-reading activities were also determined. The following research elements procedure was included in carrying out to obtain the research objectives.

4.1 Design

Among several designs, the one which seemed to fit best for the purpose of the present research was two phase tests for two experimental groups. The statistical procedure used in the study is that of Match T-Test (In fact two Match T-Tests are used: one for pre-reading questioning group and the other for vocabulary group and then results are compared). The Design of this study is:

G1 T1 X T2

G2 T1 X T2

G1 = pre –reading questioning group

G2=vocabulary pre-teaching group

The subjects were selected after results of the Proficiency test and they were randomly assigned to two experimental groups. Participants were given pre-reading activities and the reading comprehension test in their regular English lesson with their regular English teacher. In total there were two classes and a teacher, and then the post test was administered after the treatment.

4.2 Participants

The participant in this study were 60 females tenth graders belonging age 15-16 years old Students. The study was conducted in one of the public school of Ilam. A Michigan test is used, and 60 qualified students were selected to be classified randomly into two experimental groups because of their homogeneity and qualification for complementation of the research administration. Unqualified students which acquired very different marks omitted. The scores sought from the pre-test were statistically analyzed using T-test for independent samples. The researcher, then, performed the experiment following the research design, one group were taking the reading comprehension with guessing reading content from pre-reading vocabulary definition, and the other taking the course with pre-reading questioning activities.

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

At the first step, the researcher took a proficient-test and chose the qualified students to participating in the research and assigned them to two groups as experimental groups. As mentioned before, the subjects were female gender.

For both the experimental and groups, the teacher instructed the groups, which lasted for five weeks, two sessions a week and 60 minutes per session. For G1, the teacher distributed the handouts which included questions for different kinds attached to the reading passage, then asked some general questions in order to their students infer the main idea of the assigned reading. For G2, they introduced the key words and their definition, or using translation when it was necessary to clarify the meaning.

The pre-test and post-test were designed in the same forms for both groups. Each lesson started with a pre-reading activity which lasted approximately 10 minutes and was carried out immediately before the reading task. After the pre-reading activity all participants read independently without advice or help from the teacher and then proceeded with a reading comprehension test which included explicit and implicit (inferential) items. There was no time limit for reading the text or doing the test because the researcher did not consider reading speed a factor in determining the effects of pre-reading activities in this study. After taking a reading comprehension test, a questionnaire gives the information about the subject's opinion and satisfaction toward the implementation of 2 pre-reading activities. Both group's performances were evaluated by post test, and the results of post test were used as raw data to be analyzed in next steps of the research study.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data was quantitatively analyzed. The statistical analysis was performed on two sets of data, as described below, comprehension test taken before and after the treatment, the pre-test and post-test scores, were computed to determine means, standard deviation, percentages, and difference between means or pre-and post-tests of each group. The difference between means of the first group was further compared with those of the second group to determine the significance difference between the two groups. Like the scores on reading comprehension test, the scores obtained from the questionnaire administered to the two subject groups were statistically analyzed to determine means, SD, percentages, differences between means between the two subject groups. The values obtained were subsequently interpreted for their satisfaction level.

5. Results

5.1 Results related to reading comprehension before and after treatment

The reading comprehension test was administered to the two groups before and after the treatment. Group one received a type of pre-reading activity and group two the other type of pre-reading activity as described earlier. The results are presented in Table(1) and Table(2).

Table 1 Reading comprehension ability before and after treatment with guessing content from pre-reading questioning activity (N= 30)

Group 1	Total score	Highest score	Lowest score	X	S.D.	t	sig
Pre- treatment	10	8	3	6.8667	1.81437	7.681	0.000
Post-treatment	10	10	7	8.9000	1.15520		

Table(1) shows that the lowest, highest, and means scores on reading comprehension after the implementation post-test. The obtained results of post-test were found to be significantly higher than their pre-test scores, at sig level=0.05. It can be concluded that the pre-reading activity had positive effects on the subjects' reading comprehension. They scored statistically higher in the post-test than the pre-test.

Table 2 Reading comprehension ability before and after treatment with pre-reading vocabulary activity (N=30)

Group2	Total score	Highest score	Lowest score	x	S.D.	t	sig
Pre-treatment	10	8	3	6.3000	1.48904		
						4.958	0.000
Post-treatment	10	9	5	7.4667	1.33218		

Table(2) shows that the lowest, highest, and means scores on reading comprehension after the implementation post-test. The obtained results of post-test were found to be significantly higher than the obtained from the pre-test, at sig=0.05. It can be concluded that the subjects achieved significantly higher scores in the post-test than the pre-test meaning that their reading comprehension ability was better after they had experienced the pre-reading activity. Considering Table 1 and Table 2, it can be concluded that the subjects performed statistically significantly better in the reading comprehension test after they had given the two pre-reading activities (guessing reading content from pre-questioning, and vocabulary activities), at 0.05. In other words, they had significantly higher level ability in reading comprehension.

5.2 Results related to the effectiveness of guessing reading content from questioning activity and vocabulary activity

Besides investigating the effect of each pre-reading activity on the subjects' reading ability, the present study examined the difference in effectiveness of the 2 pre-reading activities on the subjects' reading comprehension ability. Table(3) shows the results of the comparison between the means scores of the pre-test and post-test of the 2 pre-reading activities.

Table 3 Effectiveness of guessing reading content from questioning activity and vocabulary activity.

Group 1 Difference between means of the pre-test and post-test after receiving guessing reading content from questioning activity		Group 2 Difference between means of the pre-test and post-test after receiving pre-reading vocabulary activity			
				T	sig
x	S.D.	X	S.D.		
2.0333	1.44993	1.1667	1.28877	2.447	.017

Table(3) shows that the difference between the means scores of the pre-test and post- test of the subjects experiencing the guessing reading content from questioning activity was 2.0333. The difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of the subjects experiencing the pre-reading vocabulary activity was 1.1667 . In other words, the students who received reading comprehension instruction with the guessing reading content from questioning activity gained more reading comprehension ability than the students who received the same reading

comprehension instruction, but with the pre-reading vocabulary activity. Therefore, it can be concluded from the results that guessing reading content from questioning pre-reading activity was more effective in increasing learners' reading comprehension ability than vocabulary activity.

6. Discussion

The actual observations gained from treatment and statistical operation show that the difference between the performances of experimental groups in pre-test and post-test is meaningful., this discussion explains the results of two hypotheses of the study.

- The first hypothesis says that there are no significant difference in students' achievement between first and second applications for the pre-reading activities. Analysis of results provided evidence for rejection of the first hypothesis, and revealed that the use of the pre-reading activities while teaching Tenth Grade students reading comprehension texts did lead to higher rate of comprehension, because the means of the experimental groups have significantly changed, for pre-questioning group in pre-test ($x=6.8$, $SD=1.81$) changed to ($x=8.9$, $SD=1.15$) in post-test. For vocabulary group in pre-test ($x=6.30$, $SD=1.48$) changed to ($x=48$, $SD=1.33$). Having compared the pretest and posttest scores of both groups, an increase in the post- test mean score of the experimental groups is noted. It can be concluded that the use of pre-reading activities is a valuable gift which teachers can give to their students as an efficient means for improving the students' achievement in reading comprehension texts.

- The second hypothesis states that pre-reading questioning activity does not facilitate reading comprehension better than vocabulary definitions.

The obtained results show that there is significant difference between mean of the two groups. Mean of post-test for G1 ($x=2.03$, $SD=1.44$) and for G2 ($x=1.16$, $SD=1.28$) show that pre-reading questioning was more effective in increasing learners' reading comprehension than vocabulary activity. This finding is consistent with the results of Gebhard (1987) whose study showed that by providing background knowledge on a reading selection, teachers can facilitate successful reading comprehension. It also provides opportunities to gain knowledge as well as recall already existing knowledge, which adds up to their reading experience. Carrell (1984, p. 335) points out that teaching new vocabulary is only effective if it is "integrated with both the student's preexisting knowledge and other pre-reading activities designed to build background knowledge". In addition to this, Carrell (1988, p.244) believes that vocabulary and schemata should be developed by "preteaching vocabulary and background knowledge concurrently". It is possible that if one group received vocabulary pre-teaching and pre-questioning simultaneously, more significant results might emerge. Further research will be needed to clarify this point.

Accordingly, a number of suggestions for teaching reading comprehension are presented based on the above discussion

- Prior to implementing any pre-reading activity to the reading comprehension class, the teacher are suggested to analyze the curriculum, learners' language proficiency level in order to make a right choice of the type of pre-reading activities.

- To make the learner more interested in the reading activity, teachers are advised to select the reading texts that were in the range of interest, or topics related to their everyday life.

- In conducting the reading class, teachers are suggested to give a clear explanation before starting to do each step of the reading comprehension activity.

- In order to incorporate the 2 pre-reading activities into the reading comprehension, the teachers are advised to be cautious with time allocation. The pre-reading activities should not take too much of the class time; rather a larger portion of the class time should be sacrificed to the main reading activities. Also a portion of the time should be allocated to post reading activities.

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